Introduction

APHIS is an action-oriented Agency within the U.S. Department of the Agriculture. Its primary mission is to protect the health and value of American agriculture and natural resources. This protection mission requires APHIS to quickly develop new programs and emergency response plans as new risks and challenges arise. This guide provides key planning information that APHIS managers need to include in program proposals reviewed outside the agency. The information applies to both emergency response proposals and plans, as well as new or established program initiatives designed to address ongoing APHIS' mission-related issues.

The intent of this Guide is to identify and provide assistance to APHIS program managers as they prepare these program proposals. While APHIS managers understand the technical aspects of their work, they have not always clearly communicated to decision makers important information such as the basic rationale behind the proposed actions, the different alternatives that were considered to address a problem, and the consequences associated with these different alternatives. These decision-makers also need to know where the proposal fits within the overall APHIS and USDA planning process.

The foundations of this planning process include **strategic plans** that set long-term agency or program delivery unit goals and strategies, **operational or emergency response plans** that detail how program units will implement strategies and achieve programmatic goals, and **program refinement plans** that help programs become more effective and efficient.

This notebook focuses on five key areas:

- Developing Strong, Defensible Basic Program Rationale
- Conducting Good Strategic Planning
- Creating Clear, Useful Operational (Action) Plans
- Integrating the Legal and Administrative Functions into the Planning Process
- Evaluating Programs for Performance (Effectiveness & Efficiency) and Refining

The Guide is separated into eight sections that cover these key areas, and it provides samples and templates. It also contains an overview of the Incident Command System (ICS) for use in emergency situations, and a checklist for new program proposals. There is also a list of helpful planning references that program managers can use to learn more about the topics covered in the Guide. **It will not include planning associated with standard technical procedures for field operations.**

A Planning Overview: Areas Covered by this Guide

Strategic Planning:

- This is Big Picture Planning: Where does the organization or program want to go over the next 5 years?
- It takes a great deal of time and energy (focus) from top leaders.
- It should not be done in a hurried fashion because it requires coordination with external stakeholders, industry input, and trend analysis.
- Good strategic planning must be integrated with financial/budgeting projections, and take into account technological advances, shifts in political climates, etc.
- No administrative issues addressed in strategic planning process

Strategic Planning is important when the Agency is developing a new program based on new or expanded functional areas. It is important to do when there is significant expansion of a current type of work, or when there is a significant shift in the way business is getting done. Examples include situations when a breakthrough in science or technology alters the way work needs to be done; when there is a significant shift in "consumer demand" for a product or service; or when there is a significant change in the cost of doing business. Strategic planning must be done by top leadership, not by mid-level management and below.

Operational Planning (in a Non-Emergency Situation)

- Generally done after strategic planning is complete and requires input from mid-level managers and below.
- Operational planning sets a course (roadmap) for how the organization or program will accomplish its long-term strategic goals.
- It requires more internal focus than at the strategic level and is usually done in increments of 1 year or less.

- Milestones and targets are established for agreed-upon unit of time that tasks are to be completed.
- Task assignments are made to individuals or units, with set deadlines and deliverable products identified.
- Clear budgets for accomplishing agreed-upon tasks are developed.
- Regular monitoring for results begins at this level.

Operational Planning in an Emergency Situation

- There is no time for formal strategic planning under an emergency circumstance, however, there should be basic strategies already identified.
- Planning generally involves same tasks as under a non-emergency situation, but on shorter time-frames, or operational planning at warp speed! (Greater urgency)
- Targets/goals and milestones are identified on a weekly, daily, or even hourly basis, depending upon the nature of the emergency.
- Goals are generally very straightforward and of an immediate nature.
- Contingency or scenario planning is often more important here than in other planning situations due to constant flux of situation.
- Monitoring for results is done frequently—maybe daily or more often if required. Adjustments are made accordingly.

Planning for Greater Effectiveness and/or Efficiency:

- This type of planning is usually done once a program has been established for a time, regardless of whether it's an emergency situation or a non-emergency situation.
- A certain level of evaluation or reflective learning has already occurred, however, additional input from field personnel is a great source of data.

- Results data gets examined and analyzed, along with the program logic model. A comparison of the logic model with the results information is made.
- Adjustments are made to functional processes, program logic gets refined if necessary, new targets/ milestones are set.

Note: Administrative Issues: Managing the Administrative Issues in all situations, including emergencies, requires good planning and attention to detail. These are important components of any planning effort below the Strategic level. Issues like contracting, workforce planning, compensation, recruitment, training, worker safety, and information technology all need to be addressed in the early stages of new program work. Detailed information on some of these issues will be provided later in this Guide.